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For Immediate Release

Judicial Nominating Commission releases names of nominees to fill vacancy on Supreme Court of Kentucky

FRANKFORT, Ky., July 19, 2006 — The Judicial Nominating Commission, led by Chief Justice Joseph E. Lambert, met today to choose nominees to replace Supreme Court Justice William S. Cooper, who retired effective June 30, 2006. This position serves the 2nd Supreme Court District, which consists of Barren, Breckinridge, Bullitt, Daviess, Grayson, Hancock, Hardin, Hart, Henderson, LaRue, Meade, Ohio, Union and Warren counties. Those nominated to fill this vacancy were attorneys J. Christopher Hopgood and Elizabeth E. Vaughn and Court of Appeals Judge John D. Minton Jr.

Attorney J. Christopher Hopgood. Hopgood graduated from the University of Kentucky with both a bachelor's degree and a law degree. He resides and works in Henderson where he practices with Dorsey, King, Gray, Norment & Hopgood. He has a general practice of law with a concentration on litigation.

Court of Appeals Judge John Minton Jr. Judge Minton earned a bachelor's degree from Western Kentucky University and a juris doctor from the University of Kentucky College of Law. He currently serves as a judge for the Kentucky Court of Appeals, representing Division 2 of the 2nd Appellate District. He resides in Bowling Green, which is also the site of his home chambers.

Attorney Elizabeth E. Vaughn. Vaughn resides and works in Henderson, Ky. She holds a bachelor's degree from Murray State University and a juris doctor from the University of Louisville School of Law. Vaughn currently serves as "of counsel" for Bach-Hamilton, LLC. Her practice concentrates on personal injury, criminal defense, domestic relations and Social Security disability. She is also active as a mediator in both civil disputes and dissolution matters.

Kentucky Constitution Addresses Judicial Vacancies

Section 118 of the Constitution of Kentucky imposes on the Governor the duty of appointing
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an interim judge when a judicial vacancy occurs. Section 118 also mandates that it is the responsibility of the Chief Justice to convene and preside over meetings of a Judicial Nominating Commission to select three qualified applicants from which the Governor must appoint. For circuit judges and district judges, the nominating commissions are local and the members selected from within the judicial circuit or district. A statewide nominating commission is convened to fill vacancies on the Court of Appeals or the Supreme Court.

Judicial Nominating Commission Process

When a judicial vacancy occurs, the executive secretary of the Judicial Nominating Commission sends a notice of vacancy to all attorneys in the judicial circuit or the judicial district affected. Attorneys can recommend someone or nominate themselves. Once that occurs, the individuals interested in the position return a questionnaire to the Office of Chief Justice. The Chief Justice then meets with the Judicial Nominating Commission to choose three nominees. The names of the applicants are not released. However, once the Judicial Nominating Commission has determined the names of the three finalists to be sent to the governor for selection, the Judicial Branch makes the names available to the public and the media. The credentials of these three nominees are sent to Gov. Ernie Fletcher for review. When the governor appoints the replacement, his office makes the announcement.

Supreme Court of Kentucky

The Supreme Court is the state court of last resort and the final interpreter of Kentucky law. Seven justices sit on the Supreme Court and all seven justices rule on appeals that come before the court. The justices are elected from seven appellate districts and serve eight-year terms. A chief justice, chosen for a four-year term by fellow justices, is the administrative head of the state's court system and is responsible for its operation. The Supreme Court may order a ruling or opinion to be "published," which means that the ruling becomes the case law governing all similar cases in the future in Kentucky.

The Administrative Office of the Courts is the operational arm of the Kentucky Court of Justice and supports the activities of more than 3,500 court system employees, including the elected offices of justices, judges and circuit court clerks. The AOC provides training and education to the state's judges.

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